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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

PRIMARY VISITATION

OF THE

Bagot

Right Rev. LEWIS, Lord Bishop of *Norwich*,

HOLDEN AT

BURY St. EDMUND's,

On Monday, *May* 17th,

FOR THE DEANRY OF SUDBURY.

By SAMUEL DARBY, M. A. 1749

Rector of *Whatfield*, in *Suffolk*.
Ses. Coll. Camb

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TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
L E W I S,
Lord Bishop of *NORWICH*,
AND
THE REVEREND THE CLERGY
OF
THE DEANRY OF SUDBURY,
THIS DISCOURSE
IS,
WITH ALL RESPECT,
INSCRIBED
BY
THEIR MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE PREACHER.



ROMANS XII. v. 3.

I say, through the Grace given unto me, to every Man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.

φρονεῖν
εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν

THE Propriety of this Advice will best appear, by considering the Persons to whom it was addressed, and the Occasion on which it was given. The Epistle is written to the Disciples residing at Rome, probably the most enlightened and philosophical Part of the Church at that Time; Men who seem to have been inquisitive after the Grounds and Reasons of their Faith, the Nature and Necessity of the Christian Revelation. The Epistle contains a full Answer to this Enquiry; and the Writer hath not neglected in many Places to intimate the Reasonableness of Moderation and Diffidence in ourselves, whenever the Ways of divine Providence are the Subject of our Meditation.

It might be then objected,—we know at least it hath been objected since,—that this was the Language of Men, whose Cause would not bear too close a Scrutiny. The Art

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of infusing a Spirit of Reverence and Submission into their Disciples had indeed been well understood, and constantly practised with Success in the Advancement of the Grecian Philosophy; and the Friends of that Philosophy might well take the Alarm, if they saw the same Methods pursued to its Subversion.—But as the Cause of the Apostle was very dissimilar from that of the Sophist, we may observe his Defence of it also conducted on a very different Plan. He enters on the Subject by giving a short but full Account of the State of Religion in the Gentile World. The Strength of Reason is allowed sufficient to discover the Nature and Attributes of God in the Works of his Creation, and to ascend from the Survey of those Things that are made to the invisible Perfections of their Creator, even his eternal Power and God-head. He proceeds to shew, that Reason, though able to lead Men to the Knowledge of the one true God, was by no Means of sufficient Force to preserve it among the Bulk of Mankind: Since even those who knew God, glorified him not as God; but changed the Glory of the incorruptible Deity into the Likeness of corruptible Men and Beasts, and were the Patrons and Encouragers of that Idolatry which overspread the Face of the Earth. Just therefore is the Remark, that their Knowledge only served to leave them without Excuse, who changed the Glory of God into a Lie, and worshipped and served the Creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Here we may clearly see, what Reason was able to do in Religion among Men who had received in the largest Measure that Gift

Gift of Nature, and had carried it by Art to it's highest Perfection. The Appeal is made to the most enlightened Ages of the World, and to the most knowing Men of those Ages; and if they were so far unable to rescue Mankind from their Subjection to Polytheism and Idolatry, that they did not deliver their own Souls, but against their better Judgment encouraged, and maintained the popular Superstitions, the Justice of God is at once vindicated in giving them over to a reprobate Mind, and his Mercy glorified in opening to those who lay in Darkness and the Shadow of Death a Prospect of Life and Immortality. For that the Severity of the Censure here is not pointed at the whole Gentile World, but chiefly at those who erred through the Pride of Reason, (darkening their foolish Heart in the Vanity of their Imaginations) is evident as well from the whole Tenor of the Argument in this Place, as from the Speech of the Apostle on another Occasion, before the Athenian Tribunal, where he assures the People, that until the Times of the Gospel, God had been graciously pleased to wink at their Ignorance. An Expression, which is not easily reconciled with the Passage before us, unless we suppose them to have different Objects in view; that the one relates to the Abuse of Reason, the Duplicity of Doctrine, the pernicious Refinements in Religion and Policy, which prevailed among their Legislators and Philosophers; the other, to the unhappy Condition of the People under their Care, the Slaves of Ignorance and Superstition, abandoned to the Corruption of their own Hearts,

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having no Hope, and living without God in the World. After this just but melancholy Representation, he proceeds to explain to them the Nature and End of the Christian Institution; to vindicate the Ways of God in the Rejection of the Jews, and calling in of the Gentiles; to press upon both the Performance of the moral Duties of the Gospel, as the indispensable Condition under which they were intitled to it's Rewards; and, lastly, to exhort them,—not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think, but to think soberly. It is not, we see, in a flight or cursory Manner, that he hath established a Claim to their Confidence in this Advice; but by a fair Appeal to History, and by strict logical Conclusion from undoubted Facts. Yet, however necessary some Caution of this Kind may appear, we do not find him, in the Language of the Sceptic, advising his Followers to discard Reason as a useless or pernicious Faculty, but to restrain it within it's proper Limits,—to think soberly. Extreme Opinions in this, as in many other Cases, are equally wide of Truth; and while some through false Conceptions of the Dignity of human Nature have represented Revelation as unnecessary, others, in an affected Humility, have thrown aside the only Criterion by which it's Truth or Falsehood can be ascertained. The Unbelievers of a late Age certainly thought very highly of our Condition, while they asserted that our Reason was too perfect to need any farther Aid or Information, and that our Virtue was even contaminated by admitting the Hope of eternal Life as an Encouragement to Perseverance in our Duty.

Duty. These Notions, however, were too extravagant to be of any long Duration: We have lived to see the Infidel abandon this Post, as untenable, and overleaping at once all the Bounds of Moderation, throw himself into the Party of the Enthusiast. With him he joins in decrying all natural Religion, though indeed with opposite Intentions, and well aware that if the Foundation be sapped, the Superstructure must fall. With him he labours to paint all human Virtue as only a Mode of Selfishness, and to represent human Reason as a never-failing Source of Error and Delusion. Nor can any Dishonour be reflected on Religion from this Conduct in its Enemies, who have never scrupled to assume any Character, or adopt any System which might best suit their Purpose, and, as Occasion required, have known how to vary their Attack, and move their Artillery at once from the Heights of Stoical Arrogance, into the low uncertain Grounds of Scepticism.

It is more to be lamented, that among those who profess to reverence that holy Name by which we are called, there should be some, who, in the Confidence of Wisdom, have not scrupled to wrest and torture the Doctrines of Scripture, in order to adapt them, not to Reason, (for Reason cannot judge in Matters beyond our Knowledge) but to their Imaginations.

I shall beg your Attention to one Instance, selected from amongst others, of this Procedure. The great Doctrine

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of the Redemption of Mankind through Christ, so largely insisted on in this and all the other Epistles of St. Paul, hath, under Colour of Metaphor and Allusion, been explained away to nothing; the Character of Jesus, the Mediator of the new Covenant, restrained to that of a moral Instructor only, and the Gospel reduced to a mere Republication of the Law of Nature.

It may be, some have too rashly attempted to remove the Veil which still rests over this mysterious Transaction, and without sufficient Warrant from Scripture or Reason, have considered the Death of Christ as a full and necessary Satisfaction made to the offended Justice of God. As we find no mention in Scripture of any other Necessity of this Sacrifice, than what arose from the divine Appointment, it may, perhaps, better become our Ignorance to be silent on this Head; and it is manifest that the Scriptures uniformly consider the Remission of Sins, and the Offer of eternal Life, as Effects flowing, not from the satisfied Justice, but from the free Mercy of the Deity; as the Gift of God through Christ. This Atonement for Sin was pre-ordained of the Creator, and voluntarily performed by him, who said, Lo, I come to do thy Will, O God; and who, by his entire Obedience, in which his heavenly Father declared himself well pleased, may justly be said, with respect to the divine Will and Intention, (for farther than this our Knowledge does not extend) to have made a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation and Satisfaction,

tisfaction, for the Sins of the whole World. Our Part in this gracious Dispensation is plainly revealed, and may be comprized in few Words, Repentance, and Faith, working by Love; and if we are not admitted to the Counsels of that divine Wisdom, by which Pardon and Immortality are freely offered to us, *we may forgive this Wrong.*

The Expressions in which this Blessing is announced to us, that we are redeemed by the Blood of Christ; that we are bought with a Price; that we are washed from our Sins through his Blood; are, doubtless, both figurative, and allusive to the religious Customs of the Jews and other Nations; but we are also told in more direct Terms, that God in Christ hath reconciled us to himself; that Christ died for our Sins; that God hath given to us eternal Life, and that this Life is in his Son: And the Use of all Language must be strangely confounded, if the Meaning be only this,—that Jesus appeared in the World as a Teacher of Righteousness, and that he was by wicked Men crucified and slain. Overwhelmed, indeed, as the Defenders of this Opinion appear to be, by the numerous and full Testimonies to the contrary, dispersed in all the Variety of literal and figurative Expression throughout the New Testament, they have yet found one Way of evading them all.

* “ We are not to look, say they, for the principal Design of the Life and Death of Christ, in particular Texts, or single Passages of the New Testament, but to consider what is suggested by a View of the History itself, what may be called the Language of naked Facts; that which does not require to be written; what the Facts themselves necessarily speak, without any Interpretation.” And is so great a Cloud of Witnesses thus easily dispersed, by the idle Breath of one hardy unsupported Assertion? The Facts,—that our Lord appeared upon Earth,—that he led a blameless and exemplary Life,—wrought many beneficent Miracles,—suffered, died, and rose again;—what are we to infer from them? Can we from Facts alone draw this one important Conclusion, that he is become the first Fruits of them that sleep in him? Yes, it said, we may, *for he taught the Doctrine of a future Life* †.

If you appeal to his Discourses, the Argument from mere Facts, I presume, is abandoned.

He directed the Views of his Disciples to Heaven, and Immortality †.

He did this, and more—much more—he purchased it for them. *He gave his Life a Ransom for many.* He

* Hist. of Corrupt. of Christ. p. 171.

† P. 172.

died

died for our Sins, and rose again for our Justification.

Whither then shall we go, or where shall we seek the Words of eternal Life, but in his gracious Declarations ?

It is allowed, indeed, nay it is alledged, that † *the principal Design of the Life and Death of Christ, was to ascertain and exemplify the Resurrection.* And in Order to

prove this Point, the following Passages are produced.

† *This is the Will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal Life; and I will raise him up at the last Day.—I am the Resurrection, and the Life.—I am come that they might have Life.—I have the Keys of Death and the Grave.—Christ hath abolished Death.* It is impossible here

not to observe a striking Difference between the Text and the Comment : The Doctrine of the Comment is, that our Lord *announced* eternal Life to his Followers : The Doctrine of the Text, that he *procured* it for them ; that he is the Author and Bestower of that Resurrection, which he came to ascertain, and to exemplify. The Redemption of Mankind by the Death of Christ, was of old revealed to the Fathers by the Prophets ; shadowed out by the Sacrifices of the Mosaic Law ; repeatedly declared by our Lord ; and fully and frequently inculcated by his Apostles : It is a Doctrine which our Reason cannot fully comprehend, but to which it finds nothing to object ; it harmonizes with the Course of God's moral Providence in this State, in which both Good and Evil are dispensed frequently through the Mediation of others ;

† P. 175.

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and is entirely consistent with the Belief, that in the final Consummation of all Things, every one shall receive according to his Works.

Still we are told, it is injurious to the moral Character and Government of God, contrary to the Old Testament, where he is described as merciful and long-suffering, and to the New, where we are said by St. Paul, to be justified *freely, by his Grace.* * *Now certainly if the Favour had been procured by the Suffering of another Person, it could not be said to be bestowed freely.* If on other Occasions the Apostle is censured by this Writer, as reasoning inconclusively, he is here treated with still greater Severity, and denied the common Privilege of interpreting his own Words: He hath told us, in this very Passage now quoted, that *we are justified freely by the divine Grace, through the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation, or rather, the Seat of Propitiation, through Faith in his Blood, to declare his Righteousness for the Remission of Sins that are past, through the Forbearance of God.* Can the Love of God receive a greater or brighter Manifestation? *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all Things?* Reason may inform us, that the Wages of Sin is Death; but will Reason also instruct us, that Immortality—a happy Immortality, is the legitimate Reward of a Life, spent,

the greater Part in Sin, and the Remainder in Repentance? Even this too is intimated. For, * *Justice in the Deity can be nothing but a Modification of Benevolence.* Blessed be his holy Name. Mercy and Truth meet together before his Throne; and they have, no Doubt, their proper Departments: But it is not the Office of the Criminal to assign them. And who will tell me, that Justice, manifested in the Punishment of my Sins, may not be one Mode in which the Divine Benevolence will hereafter be exercised toward some other Part of the Creation? Surely we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; we do not sufficiently reflect on the Weakness of our Understanding, and the Shortness of our Views, when we thus boldly arraign the Counsels of eternal Wisdom, wherever they do not fall within the narrow Limits of our Comprehension. Let Reason enjoy all its due Honours: Let it be considered as the primary Revelation of God to Man, as the Test by which all other Revelations must submit to be tried: Whatever is manifestly contrary to Reason, let it be thrown aside, as not proceeding from God: But let us not object to an infinite system of Government, which has the whole Creation for its Object, that we do not see the Use or Expediency of all its Parts, of those Parts in which we have no active Concern, and call this Reasoning; or let us allow that Objections of this Kind, and those too multiplied in Proportion to our Ignorance, will bear with equal Force

* P. 168, and elsewhere.

against the Christian Revelation, and against God's natural Government over the World; and consider, whither, in the End, this Reasoning may chance to lead us.

It is still more surprizing, that while Men place such entire Confidence in their moral Behaviour, as to refuse any Mediation or Intercession (the Mediation and Intercession of the Son of God) on their Behalf, this moral Behaviour should be the declared Result of Matter, and Motion, and Mechanism. Yet is this among the Doctrines by which the Church is to be restored to its original Purity. An infinite Chain of Causes and Events is extended throughout the Universe, reaching from Creation to the End of Time: Our Will is one Link in this Chain, necessarily dependent on that which is above, and supporting that which is beneath it. In all our Actions, we are said, indeed, in common Language, to be influenced by Motives: But, whatever the Manner of this Influence may be, it is understood to be precisely the same in Degree, with that by which a Stone falls to the Ground, or a Cloud is driven before the Wind. This Doctrine of Fate may have heretofore afforded a melancholy Retreat to the Unbeliever, or soothed the gloomy Mind of the self-elected Predestinarian; but it is with Astonishment we receive the Discovery, reserved for modern Times, that it is the only Foundation of Virtue, and that the Christian Temple cannot be supported, but on the two Pillars of Materialism and Necessity.

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Those who know with what Fascination Prejudice acts, even on ingenuous Minds, will not doubt the Sincerity with which these Declarations are made; and the Learning and Ability with which they have been defended, are certainly worthy of Respect: Yet, surely, Candour will allow us to suppose there is some Departure from that Sobriety of Thought here recommended by the Apostle, in those who reject a positive Doctrine of Christianity, through Fear lest it should intrench on the Justice or the Mercy of God, while they hold Opinions subversive of every Idea which Men usually entertain of moral Perfection in the Deity; representing his Justice engaged to reward those good Actions, which we were under a Necessity of performing, and his Mercy, his infinite Mercy, exercised in the Forgiveness of Sins, which it was impossible for us to avoid.

The great Question concerning human Liberty, if we may judge from the fruitless Attempts to explain it, is somewhat beyond the Reach of our Faculties, and probably will continue so. But, various as the Opinions of ingenious Men have been in this Matter, and unequal as all their Researches have appeared to the Extent of the Subject, the Belief of our Freedom hath been always admitted without Hesitation in our Intercourse with each other. A Circumstance, which might incline some to think, that the opposite Doctrine may deserve a Place among those subtle and fine-woven Theories, which have

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floated a while in Philosophical Imaginations, and then sunk, and been heard of no more. The Opinions,—that we see all Things in God;—that Religion consists in a total Suspension and Quietism of all our mental Faculties,—or that, by a pre-established Harmony, every Motion of the Body hath from Eternity been adapted to a correspondent Determination of the Mind at the given Instant, have not wanted the Patronage of Men respectable for their Genius and Virtue: But, being too remote from Nature and common Understanding, were never able to gain the public Approbation, and have fallen gradually into Neglect and Oblivion: While the Belief of the Existence and Perfections of God, of the Freedom of Human Action, and of the consequent Propriety of Reward and Punishment, though often obscured by Ignorance, or deformed by Superstition, hath yet obtained very generally among Men of Reason and Science in all Ages of the World. So just is the Observation of the great Roman Philosopher, * that Time never fails to destroy the Fictions of Opinion, or to establish the Judgments of Reason and Nature. The Christian, not bewildered in the Labyrinth of metaphysical subtlety, may yet be inclined to think, that where no Liberty is, there is no Transgression. Every one, he will see, on this Plan, must without the least Deviation pursue the Path assigned him by Destiny; † whether it lead to Glory and

* Opiniorum Commenta delet Dies, naturæ judicia confirmat.

Cic. de nat. De.

† πορευονται την επιαρημενην πορειαν.—Plat. Menex.

Honour and Immortality, or to Tribulation, Anguish, and Death. It may still therefore remain with him an unanswered Argument,—God hath declared us accountable,—therefore he hath made us free.

If there be Truth in these Reflexions, the Conclusion towards which they point, will not, perhaps, be thought unimportant ;—that we should leave to the Enemies of our Faith the Privilege of exalting or debasing human Nature at their Pleasure, and be contented that the Doctrines of the Gospel will best comport with that sober Judgment of ourselves, which is founded, not in Imagination, but in Fact and Experience. If we attend to the Voice of Reason, thus instructed, we shall soon perceive, that moral Perfection was not generally attainable by the Law of Nature, nor Revelation superfluous. For, if perfect Righteousness had come by this Law, then had Christ died in vain.

We may also learn, that the Systems of Nature and Grace, having the same divine Original, and the same benevolent End, can in no Respect be inconsistent with each other ; nor can the Christian Religion have any other Foundation, than the Religion of Nature. The mysterious Truths of the Gospel, so far as we are able to comprehend them, are consonant to our Reason, and analogous to the Methods in which divine Providence superintends our present State ; and it's moral Doctrines tend directly to the Improvement and Perfection of the Law written by God originally in our Hearts ; a Law which the Saviour of the World came not to destroy, but to fulfill.

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